

CHAPTER 4

Discussion of the Results and Conclusion

The results of this study have been reported in Chapter 3 of this report. These will now be interpreted or given meaning using a comparison of these findings against a review of the related literature and Erikson's psychosocial theory of development. This it is hoped, will provide a more comprehensive description of the types of stressors experienced by this sample of adolescent girls and therefore aid our understanding of the "daily hassles" that normal adolescents encounter.

4.1 Interpretation and Implication of the Findings

4.1.1 Kruger's (1992) Research

First, because the current research is based on Kruger's (1992) earlier work, it is important to consider her research in more detail. Kruger studied a group of 1 285 pupils. The pupils were in grade 10, grade 11 and grade 12 and were both boys and girls. Adolescents from both Afrikaans and English schools were involved in the investigation. Kruger's research using the ASII revealed a considerable number of significant differences between urban and rural adolescents, Afrikaans and English speaking adolescents and boys and girls. Fewer differences were noted between pupils in the different standards (Kruger, 1992).

Even though the sample in Kruger's research was much larger and the pupil's backgrounds were quite different to that of the pupils used in the current research, it is interesting to compare the findings between the two studies and note the main similarities and differences of the types of concerns that the adolescents generally perceived as stressful. This comparison will also help to determine whether the ASII meets the need as a suitable stress-identification instrument.

4.1.2 Brief Comparison of Concerns between the Two Studies

There is a remarkable amount of similarity in the comparative age cohorts in Kruger's (1992) study and the current research. For example, adolescents in both studies feel that they have too much to do and to little time to do it in (item 85). Furthermore, like

the sample of girls in Kruger's study, the adolescent girls in the current research are mainly concerned about what other people think of them (item 5), the violence in the country (item 47), they worry about the future (item 1) and their choice of career (item 81). As with the grade 10 pupils in Kruger's research, the grade 10 pupils in the present study are also worried about contracting AIDS (item 97). The grade 10's in the current study are not stressed about their use of drugs or alcohol consumption compared with the adolescents in the comparative sample, who are concerned about drinking alcohol and taking drugs. The grade 10 pupil's however are concerned about being part of a circle of friends (item 88). A large percentage of the respondents from the current research indicated that they are also concerned about their appearance (item 36), not being able to speak to their parents about their problems (item 43), and are not satisfied with their bodies (item 82). These same items were also highlighted as concerns amongst the adolescents used in the sample in Kruger's research. Compared with the grade 11 sample in Kruger's research who feel a great source of their stress is because they are required to write too many tests, the grade 10 pupils in the current research think that their school work is too difficult. Although some of the girls in the current research sample expressed that they are concerned about what other people think of them (item 5), and a few worry about whether they will be able to answer questions in class (item 59), a large percentage of the girls in grade 10 and grade 11 said that they do not feel humiliated at school (item 55), or think that people pick on them (item 2).

In terms of the current research which consciously selected for race because the researcher wanted to determine whether there were any significant similarities and differences in the stressors identified amongst the different race groups, it was quite interesting to note that the stressors were quite similar across the different racial groups. However, as can be seen from the large percentage of negative responses to a significant number of the items on the questionnaire, the Coloured pupils in the sample appeared to experience their stressors in a more profound way.

The findings from the two studies suggest that the pupils in both samples experienced a number of day to day issues as similarly stressful and therefore it would seem that the ASII can be administered to good effect to identify stress in adolescents.

4.1.3 Using Factor Analysis to Identify Stressors

For the present research, the results of the factor analysis for girls in grade 10 and grade 11 and between the various, historically defined race groups have already been presented and discussed in chapter 3. Kruger (1992) identified the five factors and designated the hundred items in the ASII questionnaire as relating to societal demands, self-concept, future expectations, relationships and positive experience so that all the items in the respective factors fit into a specific description. This mode of classification is useful in identifying and comparing different stressors. It revealed that stressors can be classified into the different groups thus making it easier to understand what the stressors are that are causing the adolescent to experience difficulties, and in which area one needs to focus, in order to try to help them cope with the stress. For example, when considering the results gathered from the current research, it is clear that the grade 10 and grade 11 pupil's are experiencing a great deal of stress relating to their future expectations, i.e. they are worried about their future careers and are also feeling insecure about the future of the country.

Secondly, the grade 11's appear to have a better positive perception of themselves, their family and the community when compared with the grade 10's. In terms of the factor analysis categories, this means that the grade 11's generally have a positive experience. Results indicate that the grade 10's feel more negatively about their parents understanding them, being part of a circle of friends, being able to speak to parents about their problems, having time to do what they like and feeling satisfied with their bodies.

When comparing items in the factor analysis category, self – concept, another example that highlights the differences amongst the variable race groups can be seen in the Coloured sample of adolescents. A large percentage of negative responses to the items in this factor, indicate that the Coloured pupil's are experiencing a great deal of stress and feel negatively about themselves. They also appear to be experiencing a great deal of uncertainty and may be feeling inferior compared with their peers from other race groups.

Compared to life-events scales used by many researchers, the ASII allows the adolescent to express his / her unique attribution of meaning to, and experience of, a stressor which constitutes a relatively new area of scientific inquiry.

4.1.4 The efficacy of the ASII

Although the ASII wasn't standardized in terms of race it is quite interesting to note that the ASII was able to detect differences and identify stressors in the different race groups of the participants in the current research. This means that the ASII is not only valid as an instrument to identify stress between male and female, urban and rural adolescents but also appears to be valid to detect stressors in different race groups. The validity of this claim will however need to be supported by a more sustained statistical analysis and a larger sample.

4.1.5 Understanding Adolescence

Adolescence has long been characterized as a time when individuals begin to explore and examine psychological characteristics of the self in order to discover who they really are, and how they fit into the social world in which they live. Adolescence is considered to be a particularly vulnerable period in the life cycle due to the nature and rate of changes that occur concurrently – biological changes (e.g., puberty), cognitive development (e.g., critical and analytical evaluation of events and circumstances, herself, her parents and other people), interpersonal relationships (e.g., increased identification with peers and moving towards dependency from parents), and emotional challenges (e.g., achieving moral maturity and establishing an internal system of values).

Understanding adolescence from a theoretical perspective, Erikson identified adolescence as the fifth stage of psychosocial development. According to Erikson (cited in Miller, 1993), the task during adolescence is to achieve ego identity and avoid role confusion. Ego identity means knowing who you are and where you fit into the rest of society. It requires that you take all that you have learned about life and yourself and to unite it into a unified self-image, one that your community finds useful. If the individual is unable to achieve this, we are likely to see role confusion, in other words, an uncertainty about one's place in society and the world. When an

adolescent is confronted by role confusion, Erikson would say that he / she is suffering from identity crises. Hence, the common question asked by many adolescents in our society, “who am I?”

In light of Erikson, one can agree with Washburn-Ormachea *et al.* (2004), where they suggest that “in addition to those common developmental challenges experienced by all adolescents as part of normal development, adolescents encounter varying amounts of stress from multiple sources in the process of understanding and dealing with the world” (pg. 31). This is true for the sample of adolescent girls used in the current research, as some of the daily hassles that they identified as stressful included: being dissatisfied with their bodies, having a poor self-image, concerns about peer-relationships and needing to feel a part of a group, worries about their future careers and feeling insecure about the state of the country. They are also concerned about what other people think of them, meeting the expectations of parents (who often do not understand them), and the demands at school.

Much of what we learn, therefore, about atypical behaviour in adolescence informs our understanding of normal adolescent development. This research highlights the importance of examining developmentally relevant sources of stress in the lives of adolescents.

4.2 Overall Implications

The findings from this research suggest that the stressors identified by the grade 10 and grade 11 girls, who attend a private high school in Johannesburg, are normative daily stresses which are relevant to what is expected during their particular stage of development, i.e. adolescence. Although the ASII has been useful in identifying the types of stress these adolescent girls encounter, one would now need to find out what type of strategies they employ to deal with their stress and the role that various sources of support, including parents, teachers and friends, play in this process. Understanding what types of things adolescents find stressful and finding out how they cope with stress is extremely important for school psychologists, parents and teachers as well as for the adolescents themselves, to prevent and treat adolescent problems and increase adolescents’ stress resiliency.

Conclusion

Researchers have repeatedly pointed out the need for further investigation of the psychometric properties of measures of stressful events during childhood and adolescence (e.g., Johnson, 1982; Newcomb *et al.*, 1981; Swearingen & Cohen, 1985b) cited in Compas *et al.* (1987). As mentioned previously in this chapter, the current study found the ASII to be a valuable tool in the identification of stress in South African adolescents, however it is not without its limitations and the following should be considered when using it as a stress – identification instrument.

The ASII should not be used in isolation to identify stress. Some types of events may be more stressful for certain individuals than others and therefore it would be more useful if it was used in conjunction with a qualitative means of acquiring more information so that the respondent can extend on their answers and explain the stress experience if necessary. Future research concerning adolescent stress, therefore needs to address the topic using a multidimensional approach (i.e. use of questionnaires, interviews and observations, and so on).

The ASII was developed to assist teachers and psychologists to identify stressors in pupils at school. It is important for the respective people (e.g. teachers) to have an informed understanding and to be knowledgeable about the many changes that affect the adolescent and his / her becoming and development. This is important because when they use the ASII, they will need to be mindful of the fact that stress is integral to the life of every human being, including that of the adolescent but it is the way in which the person attributes meaning to such events, how he / she experiences them and comes to grips with them, that determines the effect that the stress will have on her / him.

Finally, one of the most important reasons for identifying stress in adolescents is so that adolescents will be able to learn ways to cope with their stressors in an adaptive manner. Minor daily hassles and acute stressors are associated with adolescent maladjustment (Compas *et al.*, 1987). Therefore, further study on the ways in which adolescents cope both with acute and minor stressors is warranted.

By identifying stress factors, the family, peer and school will be able to offer the adolescent appropriate and necessary support and by this promote psychological well-being, reduce problem behaviour and especially buffer the emotional effects of stress. For the adolescent, being informed about everyday stressors will enable her to conceptualize these experiences as normative developmental tasks and cast his / her interactions between stress and coping as potential sources of subsequent development.